CHAPTER FIVE
Aspects of Reading Comprehension—Its Implications and Limitations
5.0 PRELIMINARIES

This Chapter is concerned with presenting the broad findings of the study and making it a basis for formulating a set of strategies for remediation of the problem investigated. The study incorporated five hypotheses dealing with various aspects of Reading Comprehension strategies handled by a group of Higher Secondary students learning English as a second or third language. The inference drawn from each individual hypothesis is presented and the relevant implications of the inference are discussed which become the springboard for suggesting a host of remedial measures at the secondary and-tertiary levels. The Chapter concludes with suggestions for further research in this field in order to consolidate the gains resulting from this study.

5.1 IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The justification of the present study involving an investigation into the monitoring of Reading Comprehension strategies arose out of the endemic failure of a major chunk of the student population to address themselves adequately to the reading task in English. In view of the fact that reading skills and strategies constitute a major predicator of academic success for the students, the study, assumes a great deal of importance. The
major focus of the study, therefore, was to analyse, in some depth and detail, the process of comprehension and identify the shortcomings in it so that these can be remedied.

Based on the practical classroom experience of the researcher in regard to the reading performance of the students, the study encompassed five hypotheses. All these hypotheses were inter-related and constituted the whole spectrum of reading. The idea, was, to present a comprehensive account of the reading behaviour of the students involved in the study. These related to areas ranging from the significance of reading proficiency on the activation of suitable strategies, the role of interest and motivation in reading output, the variations in reading abilities and strategies used based on the correlates of background and gender.

It is necessary to point out that although each of the hypotheses can potentially be expanded into a separate study. It was felt, that, for a comprehensive description of the reading monitoring strategies, each has to contribute some insight. Moreover, analysis of students' Reading Monitoring strategies has not so far been undertaken. Piecemeal studies done so far have, at their best, had an academic value which is not of any far reaching significance. This study, therefore, decided to adopt a more pragmatic approach.
Before embarking upon an attempt at validation of the study hypotheses, the researcher took care to arrive at a general profile of the subjects of the study which was thought necessary to contribute to an understanding of their composition, reading proficiency, use of Reading Monitoring strategies and general reading habits. The whole sample was found to be in a heterogeneous group according to the results of the Reading Comprehension Test and those of the Achievement Test.

As regards their reading proficiency, they were found to be more proficient in factual type and personal response questions than the discourse level strategies. They were better able to understand the meanings of words presented in the contexts. Similarly, they were in greater control of the linguistic markers, connecting sentences and paragraphs than efficiently extracting the sense from the passage. Moreover, the students displayed a wide spectrum of their hold on the organization of the text structure, their application of their linguistic knowledge for meaningful interaction with the text, their background knowledge as well as knowledge of the world. This signals that any act of reading instruction has to be multilevel and multifaceted.

Reviewing the general reading habits of the subjects gave the researcher a predictable picture. A remarkably higher number
of respondents indicated to be more at home not only with reading in their mother tongue than in the foreign language English, but also devoted more time to it. The materials in mother tongue, they were mostly familiar with, are newspapers and magazines, which are non-literary informative prose. Among the literary genres short stories understandably found most favour with most of the students. As far as English is concerned, short stories were the most popular variety among most of the students and novels were the least used genres. Moreover, the readers had not cultivated the healthy habit of reading in chunks in English and read word-by-word, unlike in mother tongue, due to infrequency of use of English texts.

The mainstay of the study being an analysis of Reading Comprehension strategies of Higher Secondary students, it necessitated demarcation of the whole sample into two dichotomous groups of good and poor readers. The division of the subjects into 39 good and 41 poor readers was done with a view to clearly contrasting their reading strategies. As a primary prerequisite the researcher adopted certain hypotheses for the study. An attempt was made to validate these hypotheses through which the comprehension output of both the groups of subjects as
well as the process of their operation of ability of understanding text could be tested and analysed.

For the purpose of validating Hypothesis No. 2, the group's performances in the six heads of analysis of Reading Test were compared. These were: factual, personal response, interpretation or inference, dramatic technique, grammar and global understanding. These heads pertained to two broad categories. The heads Inference and Interpretation of the text are related to discourse skills while the rest four summed up linguistic skills.

The results revealed that in the discourse skills, both the groups were relatively poorer, although the group of 'good readers' exemplified a greater command of these skills than the 'poor group'. As far as the linguistic skills are concerned the good group demonstrated a higher control over factual, personal response and global understanding, than the poor group.

By and large, both the groups demonstrated dependence on orthography to varying degrees. Whereas, the group of 'good readers' tended to be relatively less dependent on orthography, to decipher the meanings of the linguistic units, as expected, a sizable number of 'poor readers' showed greater dependence on
the individual word units, which betrayed a lack of improved word processing strategies.

As far as the attitude of the readers to an act of reading per second goes, a good percentage of proficient readers gave a positive response to address themselves to the reading task with an open and positive attitude as well as with self-confidence. In contrast, the 'poor readers' were rather compelled into the act by external forces. This can potentially have serious repercussion on the total reading behaviour and output of the students concerned as testified to by the performance of the 'poor readers' across various parameters in the present study.

Awareness of the goals of reading and the structure of the text are supposed to have important bearings on the reading outcome in qualitative and quantitative terms. The perspective was corroborated by the actual findings. The group of 'good readers' had a considerable edge over their counterparts in these two scores which presumably facilitated their reading comprehension monitoring strategies.

In terms of style of reading, both the groups fell a prey to the time honoured practice, so well cultivated in the pre-university stages. Cutting across proficiency levels, both the groups were pathetically prone to reading aloud and unused to the healthy
habits of silent reading. In this respect, both the groups approximated each other notwithstanding the slender margin of difference between them. This disturbing phenomenon has obvious implications for improvising reading instruction in this area.

With regard to word attack skills, although the good readers were decidedly better than the poor ones, yet they were not far ahead of their counterparts. This suggests important messages regarding remediation and modification of instructional repertoire, which will be discussed later.

The low profile use of comprehension strategies by both the groups was not far from their use of word attack skills. In fact, there was a close correspondence in the subjects’ use of the two aspects of reading, implying thereby the necessity of multiprogrammed approach to reading instruction. The ‘good readers’ demonstrated a deceptively better standard of accomplishment in the use of these two strategies. However, the fact remains that the so-called ‘good readers’ seemed to have miles to go to earn that name.

Moreover, the picture gleaned from the comparison between the 39 ‘good’ and 41 ‘poor readers’ performances on the Reading Test and the Strategies Questionnaire did not reveal a
consistently uniform impression. In fact, the picture was sometimes overlapping and confusing. There seemed to be a thin veil of difference between the good and poor readers' differential use of strategies, belying a neat categorization, which was the principal objective of the study. Besides, there was a lack of correspondence in the performance of each group in the Test and the Questionnaire, which was ambivalent, frustrating our attempts to arrive at a valid generalization about their use of reading monitoring strategies. With a view to surmounting this problem and, gain a clearer perspective on both the groups' performances on both the instruments, it was decided to take the help of statistical procedures. The researcher applied the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient to verify whether there was a relationship between the scores of both the groups on the two test instruments to glean some probable support for the finding of the linguistic analysis. It was found that there was a weak positive relationship between the two variables, which further accentuated the anomaly or ambiguity giving little or no support to validate the first hypothesis of the study.

This put the researcher in a fix, to resolve that which was decided to exercise a stricter control to carve out from the two groups core groups of 'good' and 'poor' readers and subject them
to the same procedures of linguistic as well as statistical analysis. It was expected that analysis of the core groups performances would help obtain a clearer and more reliable profile about their use of reading strategies.

In accordance with the procedures followed for the analysis of reading performance and strategies of the 39 good and 41 poor readers, those of the core groups were also investigated. First, their scores in the Reading Test were analysed, followed by analysis of their use of Reading Monitoring strategies.

Before discussing the results, it would be useful to make a general observation regarding the benefit of sub classification or delimiting of the sample into core groups. The good readers, whether they are 46 in the whole sample or 23 in the core groups, demonstrated an unalteringly steadfast record of performance on the Reading Comprehension Test. So in this respect there was not much of a differential benefit out of the sub categorization. However, as far as the Reading Comprehension monitoring strategies were concerned, there was a distinctive differential trend discernible in the larger group and the carved-out group. In other words, the core group of 'good readers' demonstrated a more tangible or crystallized picture about the use of their reading
strategies, satisfying the objective of sub classification than the larger group of 46 'good readers' in the whole sample.

As far as the 'poor readers' use of Reading Comprehension strategies goes, the sub categorization proved to be equally beneficial, especially in respect of use of reading monitoring strategies. It brought to a clearer focus, the fact that the core 'poor readers' are really deficient in both comprehending the text and using the Reading Monitoring strategies. In fact, each of the abilities subsumed the other.

The results indicated that the core group of 'good readers' displayed a better quality of performance in the linguistic skills. This clearly proved the fact that despite being supposedly good readers, they have not been adept in comprehension skills at the discourse level, putting a question mark on their label as good readers.

However, a comparison between the 'core good and poor readers' performance on the Reading Test reveals that the former demonstrated decidedly an edge over the latter on all the six heads of analysis of the Test.

An analysis of the use of Reading Comprehension monitoring strategies by the core 'good readers' on each of the six heads of the Reading Monitoring Strategies Questionnaire

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showed that they were relatively more efficient users of orthographic cues, were better motivated, more aware of the reading purpose and the type of the text at hand, better users of silent and fast reading techniques, of reading in chunks as well as of word attack skills and comprehension strategies than the poor readers.

The validation of Hypothesis No. 1 is a sequel to both linguistic and statistical analysis. Having made the linguistic analysis, the task involved application of Pearson Product-Moment Coefficient of Correlation, which would qualify the results of the linguistic analysis. Findings of both the modes of investigation, linguistic and statistical, helped the researcher to validate the hypothesis.

Parallel to the procedure adopted for validating the previous hypothesis, for the purpose of validation of Hypothesis No. 3, the researcher calculated the correlation coefficient between the scores of the whole sample on the Reading Test and the Schema Related Items. A comparison of both the groups, terms of activation of appropriate Schema showed that the good readers had a better ability to personal type activation techniques than the poor ones. In order to relate the performance [product] of the two groups to their Schema activation abilities [process], their
percentages on the six heads of analysis of the Reading Test were compared. The good readers were found to have a superior activation of schema than their counterparts. Applying Pearson Product-Moment Coefficient of Correlation between the scores of the 'good' and 'poor' readers on the Reading Test and the Schema Related Items, the researcher obtained the correlation coefficient \( r = 0.54 \), which lent a strong support to the findings of the linguistic analysis helping the researcher validate the hypothesis.

Hypotheses Nos. 4 and 5 dealt with a study of differential reading strategies related to stratification of readers in terms of background and gender. Hypothesis No. 4 necessitated a comparison of the urban and rural students' performance on the six heads of analysis of the Reading Test and their scores on the six heads of analysis of the Reading Strategies Questionnaire. It is necessary to point out that although the urban students exhibited a better order of performance at linguistic level skills than the rural students, neither of them excelled in discourse level skills. The two groups were compared on their responses to the Strategies Questionnaire which revealed that the urban students were more proficient in their use of the six heads of reading.
monitoring strategies earmarked for the present study than the rural-bred students, thereby highlighting the hiatus between the two groups. This obviously validates the hypothesis.

Similarly, in order to discriminate between the boys' and girls' use of reading strategies, the same, procedures as the urban and rural students were followed. The analysis of their performance on the six heads of Reading Test disclosed a marked superiority of the girls over the boys in all aspects of the Test adopted for the study, which was echoed in the responses of the former to the Reading Strategies Questionnaire as well. This clear and unambiguous picture about the difference in the use of reading monitoring strategies between boys and girls goes a long way to authenticate Hypothesis No 5.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The present study can be viewed as an attempt to investigate the reading processes of Higher Secondary level through a study of their reading comprehension monitoring strategies. An important sidelight of the study has, however, been to shed some light on the reading comprehension as a product so that reading as a process as well as a product can be studied in a
holistic and integrative manner contributing to a comprehensive understanding of this complex process. At the same time, the profile of the students’ reading behaviour can hopefully give some insight into building a viable instructional programme as well as remedial measures in reading in English as a second language.

From the first six questions of the Reading Comprehension Monitoring Strategies Questionnaire, it was possible to glean an overall picture.

CONCLUDING REMARKS:

1) Teachers at +2 level should adopt uniform pattern of teaching in language skill.

2) Teachers should be well equipped with the prescribed ELT training.

3) Teacher should encourage students to grasp a deeper meaning of the text and make them objective oriented rather than examination oriented.

4) Prepare the students in such a manner that they can make a difference in various types of questions and enable them to understand what the question demands.
5) Parents should adopt a technique of teaching at home so that students are able to understand the summary of the text.

6) It is advisable to parents to help their wards increase their vocabulary in English language.

7) Newspapers in English, magazines etc should be made available to them at home, to help increase the capacity of the child for reading, understanding and retaining the meanings of the content matter.

8) Parents should encourage their wards to solve the crossword puzzles, quizzes jokes, games etc. which will help them in the enrichment of their vocabulary.

9) Parents should encourage their wards to watch various English news channels on Television. They should also try to have a serious discussion over the current affairs, preferably in English language only.

5.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study occupies a strategic position in the array of reading research in English as a second / third language involving Higher Secondary students. It has a kaleidoscopic significance and value. It attempts to incorporate some of the
most pertinent parameters which contribute to the successful utilization of this complex and multifaceted skill. It is perhaps for the first time that a broadly comprehensive account of both the skill and strategies of the target subject, is attempted, encompassing the 'good' and 'poor' reader.

The scope and the format of the study as well as space and item constraints, inhibited the researcher from going in depth and detail into the causes of poor or non-performance of a section of students on the reading task. In view of this, a prospective study might focus exclusively on the psycholinguistic parameters of comprehensive short-circuit or failure.

To conclude, the findings of this study and similar studies should not have an archival importance. There should be sustained efforts to plan out an appropriate follow-up, and the multilevel agenda of action for galvanizing the reading pedagogy for the benefit of the future generations.